

Veronica Tomescu. *Acquisition in a Romanian-Hungarian Bilingual Setting. A Case Study.*
Bucharest: Editura Universității din București. 233 pp.

Reviewed by Anca Sevcenco*

The book entitled *Acquisition in a Romanian-Hungarian Bilingual Setting. A Case Study* by Veronica Tomescu is among the few publications that probe into the topic of the multiple first language acquisition of Romanian and Hungarian (the language spoken by the most numerous ethnic minority in Romania), with focus on aspects related to vocabulary and syntax and also on code-switching. As such, it represents a solid reference point for future research in the field. Drawing from data provided by three longitudinal corpora and the *Frog, where are you?* task that were collected between 2009 and 2012 as well as on numerous studies that the author presented at conferences in Romania and abroad, the book presents thorough and meticulous research anchored in a solid empirical background. The volume is therefore of interest to a target public that includes linguists, psychologists that investigate multiple first language acquisition and development, publishers of textbooks addressed to Romanian-Hungarian speaking school children.

No doubt, multiple first acquisition stands out as an essential and fruitful research topic in contemporary society. Linguists that have focused on the emergence and differentiation of simultaneously acquired grammatical systems have explored two main theoretical explanatory accounts. One approach supports the idea of autonomous syntactic development in multiple first language acquisition (de Houwer 1990, Meisel 1989, 1994, 2001, 2008, 2011). From this perspective, multiple first language acquisition is not fundamentally different from monolingual acquisition, the distinction between the languages involved is made at an early developmental stage. A competing view brings to the foreground the proposal of cross-linguistic influence (Hulk and Müller 2000, Müller and Hulk 2001) and leans towards the idea that there is influence of one language upon the other. In the cross-linguistic influence context, research predicts the existence of acquisition delays regarding linguistic structures that are at the interface between linguistic modules such as syntax and semantics, syntax and discourse (Sorace et al. 2009, Filiaci 2011, Argyri and Sorace 2007, Fernández-Fuertes and Lleras 2010, etc.).

The book under review proposes a balanced take on the extant theoretical accounts: it argues in favor of autonomous syntactic development, but, at the same time, it does not exclude the presence of cross-linguistic influences between Romanian and Hungarian that finally may lead to the existence of areas of vulnerability in the acquisition of the two languages.

The volume comprises five chapters which cover a quite wide range of data targeting four areas of interest.

Chapter 1, “Monolingual and bilingual language acquisition” (pp. 13-36), has to do with the acquisition of vocabulary in the two languages, the stage when the first instances of Merge appear (in Hungarian at first, at 1;7 years old, then in Romanian, at 1;8). Hungarian stays a bit in the lead here since it is an agglutinating language.

In chapter 2, “Early language awareness of bilingualism” (pp. 37-64), the author is concerned with (i) the development of early vocabulary, (ii) language awareness, and (iii) the earliest utterances, which provide evidence for the operation Merge as well as for the emergence of functional categories.

Chapter 3, “The IP and the CP” (pp. 65-122), looks into three main issues: (i) the verbal domain (tense, aspect, mood and modality, verbal modifiers), (ii) subordinate structures, and

* University of Bucharest, Department of English, anca.sevcenco@lls.unibuc.ro.

(iii) some remarks on the acquisition of Focus. The data converge to the conclusion that the acquisition of verbal forms in multiple first language setting proceeds along a similar path to monolingual acquisition. A quite interesting result is that aspects that pose difficulty to second language learners of Hungarian – such as the definite and the indefinite verbal conjugations – are not problematic for bilingual children, who follow a path identical to that of monolingual Hungarian acquisition. Cross-linguistic influence is manifested with regard to the Romanian copula, for which a high omission rate is observable right in those contexts in which Hungarian licenses a null copula. As for epistemic modality, an area of vulnerability is identified in Hungarian since the corpora attest no use of epistemic modality items in this language. Matters are different for Romanian. In this case, two of the corpora show data about the emergence and use of epistemic *a trebui/should* as well as of modal epistemic adverbs; no epistemic modality is produced in the third corpus, but this fact is not conclusive in any way since the recordings stopped earlier than in the other two corpora.

There is also a chapter dedicated to acquisition in the nominal domain, “Around the noun” (pp. 123-163). The issues covered are determiners, Romanian object clitics and the differential object marker (the functional preposition *pe* ‘on’), case, functional prepositions and Hungarian postpositions. Results indicate a significant vulnerability with Romanian gender agreement due to cross-linguistic influence since Hungarian does not have grammatical gender. One corpus indicates overextension of the use of the differential object marker to non-accusative contexts lasting up to the age of 2;6 years. One more problematic aspect regards misuse of Hungarian directional and locative postpositions in one corpus. Acquisition of Romanian object clitics, on the other hand, follows the same path as monolingual acquisition.

The last chapter, “Code-switching” (pp. 164-193), deals with code-switching studied in the context of story-telling.

Acquisition in a Romanian-Hungarian Bilingual Setting. A Case Study is a book with empirical and descriptive weight that advocates for viewing multiple first language acquisition as a complex process that entails acquiring two different grammatical systems independently but also as subject to cross-linguistic interference. Convincing supporting arguments for this point of view come from the analysis of data regarding the acquisition of vocabulary, functional categories, the verbal system (tense, aspect, copula, mood and modality) and the nominal domain. An additional valuable contribution of the volume is that it identifies areas of vulnerability in the process of multiple first language acquisition.

References

Argyri, E., Sorace, A. 2007. Crosslinguistic influence and language dominance in older bilingual children. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 10: 79-99.

Fernández Fuertes, R., Liceras M. J. 2010. Copula omission in the English developing grammar of English/Spanish bilingual children. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 13 (5): 525-551.

Filiaci, F. 2011. Anaphoric Preferences of Null and Overt Subjects in Italian and Spanish: A Crosslinguistic Comparison. PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh.

de Houwer, A. 1990. *The acquisition of Two Languages from Birth: A Case Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hulk, A., Müller, N. 2000. Bilingual first language acquisition at the interface between syntax and pragmatics. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 3 (3): 227-244.

Meisel, J. M. 1989. Early differentiation of languages in bilingual children. In K. Hylenstam and L. Obler (eds.), *Bilingualism across the Lifespan: Aspects of Acquisition, Maturity and Loss*, 13-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Meisel, J. M. 1994. Code-switching in young bilingual children: The acquisition of grammatical constraints. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 16 (4): 413-439.

Meisel, J. M. 2001. The simultaneous acquisition of two first languages. In J. Cenoz and F. Genesee (eds.), *Trends in Bilingual Acquisition*, 11-41. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Meisel, J. M. 2008. Child second language acquisition or successive first language acquisition? In B. Haznedar and E. Gavrusova (eds.), *Current Trends in Child Second Language Acquisition. A Generative Perspective*, 55-80. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Meisel, J. M. 2011. *First and Second Language Acquisition. Parallels and Differences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Müller, N., Hulk, A. 2001. Crosslinguistic influence in bilingual language acquisition: Italian and French as recipient languages. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* 4 (1): 1-21.

Sorace, A., Serratrice, L., Filiaci, F., Baldo, M. 2009. Discourse conditions on subject pronoun realization: testing the linguistic intuitions of bilingual children. *Lingua* 119 (3): 460-477.

Tiparul s-a executat sub c-da nr. 4676 / 2020
la Tipografia Editurii Universității din București
B-dul Iuliu Maniu, 1-3, Complex Leu
Tel.: 0799 210 566
E-mail: tipografia.unibuc@unibuc.ro, mihaela.stancu@unibuc.ro
